

September 1<sup>st</sup>

**Memory Verse**

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved,  
**we have a building of God,**  
an house not made with hands,  
**eternal in the heavens.**

2 Corinthians 5:1



**Some Russian history to read: the story of a remarkable bell**

The picture above is called the Coronation of Boris Godenov and it was painted in 1934 by the Russian painter Konstantin Korovin who lived in Paris. Can you see the massive bells in the picture? Boris's coronation took place in **Moscow** on **September 1<sup>st</sup>** 1598. Who was he? To find out we have to go back to a previous Russian Tsar, Ivan the Terrible.

Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584) ruled Russia from the age of three until his death. The nickname “Terrible” is closer in meaning to the word “terrifying” in modern English and he certainly was a terrifying ruler. He was the first Russian ruler to have the title Tsar.

Ivan did not just terrorise his poor subjects. He was responsible for the death of his own eldest son, striking him repeatedly on the head with his sceptre during a quarrel. Boris Godenov, a member of the Tsar's personal guard and also of his secret police, was present and tried to protect the prince. The Tsar attacked him too for his intervention then, horrified at what he had done, he cried out, “I've killed my son! I've killed my son!”



Now that his son was dead, Ivan's only heir was his next son, Fyodor the Bellringer, a simple-minded man, in feeble health, possibly with some intellectual disability. He earned his nickname because he was so fond of the sound of bells and often asked for them to be rung. When Ivan died, Fyodor left the running of Russia to Boris Godenov, who was his brother-in-law. Boris, a cruel, ruthless and ambitious man, wanted to be

Tsar of Russia himself. He could see that Fyodor might not last long as he was so feeble but even when he died he would not be able to take the throne because there was another son of Ivan the Terrible still living. This was a little boy called Dmitri. If Boris was to get the power he thirsted for, he had to be rid not only of Fyodor but also of Dmitri.



From 1585 to 1598 Boris ruled as regent for Fyodor. Little Dmitri, who suffered from epilepsy, was banished with his mother to her family estates at **Uglich**,<sup>1</sup> over a hundred miles north of Moscow.

A few years later the boy was discovered stabbed to death. Today we have medicines that can help control epilepsy but in those days there was no medicine for epilepsy. The official report was that he had died of accidental wounds inflicted on himself during an epileptic seizure. To this day no one knows whether or not this is true or whether he was murdered by agents of Boris.

The people of Uglich were sure *they* knew the answer to this question. They loved little Dmitri.

When the Uglich bell sounded the death knell for the boy, a riot broke out in the town. They were utterly convinced he had been murdered. Boris Godunov was so angry that he ordered the bell's ears and tongue to be torn off. Then he ordered the bell to be sent into exile to **Tobolsk**, in Siberia, over a thousand miles away. If you look at the Russian bell in the picture you will see the clapper that makes the bell sound hanging down inside. That is the "tongue". At the top on either side are the "ears" by means of which the bell was suspended. No bell could be sounded without these two parts. Tobolsk was a settlement where many of the Tsar's prisoners were sent as exiles. When the bell arrived after its long journey the governor solemnly registered it as the town's first "inanimate exile."



The people of Tobolsk seem to have taken a liking to their new fellow exile. Boris had ordered that it remain silent forever but they bravely ignored his command! They made it a new clapper and managed to hang it up somehow in a local belfry.

Because the bell was connected with poor little Dmitri, they reasoned it must be fond of children. Soon a superstitious story was going round: if you washed the bell's clapper and collected the water in a special container it would cure childhood illnesses!

If you read the lesson for 3<sup>rd</sup> August last month, you will remember the missionary traveller Friedrich Wilhelm Baedeker. Some hundreds of years after these events took place he visited Tobolsk. Here is what he wrote in his diary:

As to-day is Whit-Monday and a holiday, in which nothing can be done, we hired a cab and paid a visit to the "banished bell." Because it had sounded for rebellious purposes, it had a "sound" thrashing with the knout,<sup>2</sup> had two of its "ears" broken off, and was banished. It has never been restored to its place; but it is still used, and has an unusually clear sound at the slightest touch. "Made perfect through suffering."

If you go to Tobolsk today you will not find the bell. What happened to it? When the communists took control of Russia in 1917, it was not long before bell ringing was not allowed. Then many of the great cathedrals were destroyed and so were the bells. When communism fell in 1991, determined Russian bell ringers dug up bells that had been buried in fields and fished out bells that had been thrown into rivers. But many had simply been melted down for the metal that they contained. The "banished bell" probably suffered the same fate.<sup>3</sup>

1 There are a number of Russian towns with this name today. The one in this story is in modern **Yaroslavl Oblast**.

2 A Russian whip used for severe floggings.

3 You can learn more about this and also hear the distinctive sound of Russian bells here:

And Boris? When Fyodor the Bellringer died in 1598 he assumed the throne as there was no heir. And so began Russia's "Time of Troubles" with imposters appearing claiming to be Dmitri, other usurpers claiming the throne, lawlessness, famines, wars, and other horrors in which over a million Russians died. Alas for Russia!

### Something to think about

If you have read much about Russian history you might wonder if there was ever a time when Russians were not experiencing troubles! In last month's lesson about Dr Baedeker<sup>4</sup> we read of the troubles of Russians in the nineteenth century. Did you do the lessons for February 7<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> April?<sup>5</sup> If you did will remember that under the communists Russia was certainly troubled. Why is there such suffering in some parts of the world?

When we consider the whole course of human history, with an unprejudiced eye we are forced to conclude that the relative peace and safety which we enjoy in Britain does not seem to be the norm. In fact, as we look around the world, it is not the norm today either.

It certainly seems that the gospel brings with it great blessings in national life. To the degree that a nation bases its laws and customs on the Word of God there is justice and then peace and prosperity is the result. When the word of God is ignored, rulers are unrestrained in evil and misery is the result. God's Word has been so deeply seated in our own country's civil institutions over a long history that it is taking a huge effort on the part of the godless men of our own generation to uproot it. If we love the Lord, we must pray that God will send preachers of his Word again to awaken our country again, not because we long for peace and prosperity – that is a side effect – but because we long for people to have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Something to listen to

Do you know what a canon is – a musical canon that is? The composer of one of the most famous canons ever was born on September 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>6</sup> His name name is Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706). He was a close associate with the Bach family and a friend of Johann Ambrosius Bach, the great J S Bach's father. He lived for a time in the house of Johann Christoph Bach, J S Bach's elder brother.<sup>7</sup>

You have sung a canon yourself if you have ever sung "Frère Jacques" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" because these are rounds and a round is just a kind of canon. These two songs are called strict canons because the same tune is sung by the follower (called the *comes* [pronounced *comb-es* with a silent b ]) as by the leader (called the *dux*).

Pachelbel was a prolific composer and in his lifetime his music was very popular. He wrote music for Lutheran church services, organ music, chamber music (like the famous canon of which more below) and he was also a well known music teacher with many pupils. Sadly, much of his music no longer survives and only one piece still exists in his autograph handwriting.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8R9R9O4hIg&t=10s>

4 Lesson for 3<sup>rd</sup> August.

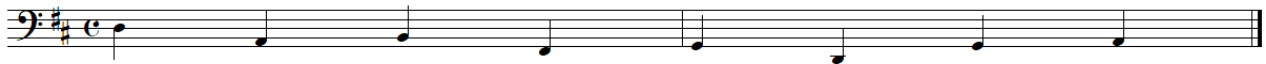
5 This is more on this topic in the lesson for December 13<sup>th</sup>.

6 September 1, according to the old calendar then in use, 11 September in modern style dating. Also strictly speaking this is the date of his Christening; the exact day of his birth is not known. For more on the change of calendar see the lesson coming up on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

7 We learned about J S Bach in the lessons for 7<sup>th</sup> May, and 8<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July.



Find a recording of Pachelbel's famous canon to listen to today.<sup>8</sup> Pachelbel's canon is a *strict* canon; the three violins are playing exactly the same music throughout the whole piece one behind the other. What about the other instruments? Pachelbel's canon is also an *accompanied* canon which means something else is accompanying the canonic parts. The accompaniment is played by the continuo<sup>9</sup> instruments and these may differ from performance to performance. Usually there is an instrument that can play a single bass line, such as a cello, and an instrument capable of playing chords, such as an organ, harpsichord or lute. The whole piece is built on what the bass instrument (cello etc.) plays. This is a series of notes known as a *Romanesca* Bass.



If you play any instrument that uses the bass clef (e.g. the piano) you will be able to play this for yourself.

These two bars are repeated over and over throughout the piece while the three violins play their canon above it and the keyboard or lute players improvise chords on the basis of the figures (little numbers) Pachelbel probably provided – we only have a very late printed edition of the canon so we don't know what the original manuscript looked like.

Pachelbel's Canon is a popular piece these days but I am old enough to remember a time when if you had mentioned it, even to an enthusiastic music lover, you would have received only a blank look. Pachelbel, if he was known at all, was just an obscure composer of pre-Bach organ music. A specialist might know of the German musicologist Gustav Beckmann who in 1919 had published it in an article about Pachelbel in the German music periodical *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* but no one outside specialist circles had heard of it. Then in 1968 it was recorded by a French chamber orchestra and the piece became a popular request on American radio stations. It has remained very popular ever since.

### Something to think about

Pachelbel's canon is a popular piece of music. Does that mean that it is a good piece of music? If so was it less good all those years ago when it was unknown? Does the popularity of a piece of music have any bearing on how good it is? If not, how can we judge the value of a piece of music?

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<sup>8</sup> There is an excellent one here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvNQLJ1\\_HQ0&t=82s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvNQLJ1_HQ0&t=82s)

<sup>9</sup> You may remember from the lessons for 28<sup>th</sup> July that the keyboard or plucked string player does not have the music in full. He has the bass line which the cellist is playing and under it some little numbers. On the basis of this “figured bass” as it is called he has to improvise his part.